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IOLA, KANSAS.

CALLER BACK.

A Well-Told Story of Continuous and Absorbing Interest.

BY HUGH CONWAY.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"You will pay me and blame me for nothing. But later—once more I say it—the signora is not for love or marriage."

"Superstitions of old! I love Pauline's charms to be turned in a nursery! Then a bell rang and Teresa left me. In a few minutes she reappeared and conducted me up-stairs to a room in which I found my beautiful Pauline and her uncle. She raised her dark dreamy eyes and looked at me—the most inflated man could not have flattered himself that the light of love was in them."

I fully expected that Dr. Ceneri would have left us to arrange matters alone; but no—he took me by the hand and in a stately manner led me to his niece.

"Pauline, you know this gentleman," she bowed. "Yes, I know him."

"Mr. Vaughan," continued Ceneri, does us the honor of asking you to be his wife."

I could not permit all the wooing to be done by proxy, so I stepped forward and took her hand in mine.

"Pauline," I whispered, "I love you—since first I saw you I have loved you—will you be my wife?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she replied, softly, but without even changing color.

"You can not love me now, but you will by and by—will you not, my darling?"

She did not respond to my appeal, but then she did not refuse me, neither did she strive to withdraw her hand from mine; she remained calm and undemonstrative as ever; but I threw my arm round her, and in spite of Ceneri's presence, kissed her passionately.

"You can not love me now, but you will by and by—will you not, my darling?"

She did not respond to my appeal, but then she did not refuse me, neither did she strive to withdraw her hand from mine; she remained calm and undemonstrative as ever; but I threw my arm round her, and in spite of Ceneri's presence, kissed her passionately.

"I think you had better go now," said Ceneri. "I will arrange everything with Pauline. You must do on your part all that is necessary for the day after to-morrow."

"It is very sudden," I said.

"It is, but it must be so—I can not wait an hour longer. You had better leave me now and return to-morrow."

I went away with my head in a whirl—I was uncertain as to what to do. The temptation to call Pauline my own in so short a time was great; but I could not deceive myself by thinking that she cared for me at all, as yet. But, as Ceneri said, I could do my worst for marriage. Still I hesitated. The hurried proceeding was so strange. Ardent as I desired to wed Pauline I wished I could have won her. Would it not be better to let her uncle take her to Italy, then follow her and learn if she could love me? Against this prudent course Ceneri's vague threat, that in such an event, his mind might be changed—and more than all, I was desperately in love. Although it could only be for her beauty that I loved her, I was madly in love. Fate had thrown us together, she had escaped me twice—now the third time she was offered to me unreservedly. I was superstitious enough to think that if I rejected or postponed accepting the gift, it would be withdrawn forever. No—come what will, in two days' time Pauline shall be my wife!

I saw her the next day, but never alone. Ceneri was with us all the time. Pauline was sweet, silent, shy and languid. I had much to do—much to see to. Never was a wooing so short or so strange as mine. By the evening all arrangements were made, and by ten o'clock the next morning Gilbert Vaughan and Pauline March were man and wife—two who had not in their lifetime ever conversed for a time amounting, say to three hours, were linked together for better or worse till death should part them.

Ceneri left immediately the ceremony was over, and to my astonishment, Teresa announced her intention of accompanying him. She did not fail to wait on me for the promised reward, which I gave her freely and fully. My heart's fire was quenched, and by her aid it had been compassed.

Then, with my beautiful bride, I started for the Scottish lakes, to begin the wooing which should have been completed before the final step had been taken.

CHAPTER V.—

PROUD AND HAPPY AS I felt when seated side by side with Pauline in the railway carriage which was taking us to the north, fortunate as I told myself I was to have won such a fair bride; great as my love was for the sweet girl who had just vowed herself mine forever, Ceneri's extraordinary stipulation kept recurring to my mind, and the man who married Pauline March was content to take her as she is; to wish to know nothing of her past.

Not for one minute did I think such a contract could be enforced. As soon as I had succeeded in making Pauline love me she would surely wish to tell me all her history—there would be no need to ask for it—she would volunteer it. But she learned the secret of love all other secrets would cease between us.

My wife looked very beautiful as she sat with her head leaning against the dark cloth of the carriage. Her clear-cut, refined features showed in that position advantageously. Her face, as usual, was pale and calm; her eyes were cast down. A woman to be indeed proud of, to worship, to adore, and—how sweet it seemed to whisper the word to myself—my wife!

Yet I suspect none would have taken us for a newly married couple. At any rate there were no nudgings and sly glances among our fellow-passengers. The ceremony had been so hurried on that no attempt had been made to invest Pauline with the usual bridal accessories. Her dress, although becoming and fashionable, was one in which I had seen her several times. Neither of us had any new belongings to stamp us as being bound for a honeymoon; so the only notice we attracted was the notice which was due to my wife's great and uncommon beauty.

The carriage was nearly full when we started from London, and as the strangeness of our new relations prevented our conversing in an ordinary way, by mutual consent we were all silent; a few soft words in Italian were all I could trust myself to speak until we were alone.

At the first important station, the first place at which the train stopped for any time without mentioning, I exercised a little diplomatic bribery, and changing our carriage we were installed in a compartment the windows of which bore the magic word "engaged."

My bride and I did not visit the Lakes as I had planned in two days' time I had learned the whole truth—learned all I could know—all that I might ever know about Pauline. The meaning of the old woman's repeated phrase, "she is not for love or marriage," was manifested to me. The reason why Dr. Ceneri had stipulated that Pauline's husband should be content to take her without inquiring into her early life was clear. Pauline—my wife—my love, had no past!

No knowledge of the past. Slowly at first, then with swift steps, the truth came home to me. Now I knew how to account for that puzzled, strange look in those beautiful eyes—knew the reason for the indifference, the apathy, the deadness of the face of the woman I had married was fair as the morning her figure as perfect as that of a Grecian statue; her voice low and sweet; but the one thing which animates every charm—the mind—was missing!

How shall I describe her? Madness means something quite different from her state. Imbecility would still less convey my meaning. There is no word I can find which is fitting to use. There was simply something missing from her intellect—as much missing as a limb may be from a body. Memory, except for comparatively recent events, she seemed to have none. The power of reasoning, weighing and drawing deductions seemed beyond her grasp. She appeared unable to recognize the importance or bearing of occurrences taking place round her. Sorrow and delight were emotions she was incapable of feeling. Nothing appeared to move her. Unless her attention was called to them she noticed neither persons nor places. She lived as by instinct—rose, ate, drank and lay down to rest as one not knowing why she did so. Such questions or remarks as came within the limited range of her capacity she replied to—those outside it passed unheeded, or else she troubled eyes sought for a moment the questioner's face, and left him as mystified as I had been when first I noticed that curious, unerring look.

Yet she was not mad. A person might have met her out in company, and after spending hours in her society might have carried away no worse impression than that she was shy and reticent. Whenever she did speak her words were as those of a perfectly sane woman; but as a rule her voice was only heard when the ordinary necessities of life demanded, or in reply to some simple question. Perhaps, I should not be far wrong in comparing her mind to that of a child—truly, she was a child's mind in a woman's body—only that woman was my wife!

Life to her, so far as I could see, held no mental pleasure or pain. Considered physically, I found that she was more influenced by heat and cold than by any other agents. The sun would tempt her out of doors, or the cold wind would drive her in. She was by no means unhappy. She seemed quite content to sit by my side, or to walk or drive with me for hours without speaking. Her whole existence was a negative one.

And she was sweet and docile. She followed every suggestion of mine, fell in with every plan, was ready to go at three o'clock, or even, as I wished; but her compliance and obedience was that of a slave to a new master. It seemed to me that all her life she must have been accustomed to obey some one. It was this habit which had so misled me—had almost made me think that Pauline loved me, or she would not have consented to that hasty marriage. Now, I knew that her ready obedience to her uncle was not a really true thing, but the inability of her mind to offer resistance, and its powerlessness to comprehend the true meaning of the step she was taking.

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"You are tired, Pauline," I said; "would you like to go to your room?"

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"Good-night, then," I said; "to-morrow you will feel better, and we will look at the lions of the place."

She rose; we shook hands, and said good-night to each other. I went to her room, whilst I went out for a ramble through the gas-lighted streets, and with a sad heart recalled the events of the day.

Husband and wife! The bitter mockery of the words! For in everything except the legal bond Pauline and I were as far apart as we were on that day when I first saw her at Turin. Yet this morning we had vowed to love and cherish each other until death do us part. Why had I been rash enough to take Ceneri at his word? Why not have waited until I had ascertained that the girl could love me, or at least ascertained that she had the power of loving at all? The apathy and utter indifference she displayed felt like a chill upon my heart. I had done a foolish thing—a thing that could never be undone. I must bear the consequences. Still I would hope—hope, particularly, for what to-morrow might bring forth.

I walked about for a long time, thinking over my strange position. Then I returned to the hotel and sought my own apartment. It was one of the suite of rooms I had engaged, and next to my wife's. I dismissed, as well as I could, all hopes and fears until the morning came, and, tired with the day's events, at last slept.

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I walked about for a long time, thinking over my strange position. Then I returned to the hotel and sought my own apartment. It was one of the suite of rooms I had engaged, and next to my wife's. I dismissed, as well as I could, all hopes and fears until the morning came, and, tired with the day's events, at last slept.

My bride and I did not visit the Lakes as I had planned in two days' time I had learned the whole truth—learned all I could know—all that I might ever know about Pauline. The meaning of the old woman's repeated phrase, "she is not for love or marriage," was manifested to me. The reason why Dr. Ceneri had stipulated that Pauline's husband should be content to take her without inquiring into her early life was clear. Pauline—my wife—my love, had no past!

No knowledge of the past. Slowly at first, then with swift steps, the truth came home to me. Now I knew how to account for that puzzled, strange look in those beautiful eyes—knew the reason for the indifference, the apathy, the deadness of the face of the woman I had married was fair as the morning her figure as perfect as that of a Grecian statue; her voice low and sweet; but the one thing which animates every charm—the mind—was missing!

How shall I describe her? Madness means something quite different from her state. Imbecility would still less convey my meaning. There is no word I can find which is fitting to use. There was simply something missing from her intellect—as much missing as a limb may be from a body. Memory, except for comparatively recent events, she seemed to have none. The power of reasoning, weighing and drawing deductions seemed beyond her grasp. She appeared unable to recognize the importance or bearing of occurrences taking place round her. Sorrow and delight were emotions she was incapable of feeling. Nothing appeared to move her. Unless her attention was called to them she noticed neither persons nor places. She lived as by instinct—rose, ate, drank and lay down to rest as one not knowing why she did so. Such questions or remarks as came within the limited range of her capacity she replied to—those outside it passed unheeded, or else she troubled eyes sought for a moment the questioner's face, and left him as mystified as I had been when first I noticed that curious, unerring look.

Yet she was not mad. A person might have met her out in company, and after spending hours in her society might have carried away no worse impression than that she was shy and reticent. Whenever she did speak her words were as those of a perfectly sane woman; but as a rule her voice was only heard when the ordinary necessities of life demanded, or in reply to some simple question. Perhaps, I should not be far wrong in comparing her mind to that of a child—truly, she was a child's mind in a woman's body—only that woman was my wife!

Life to her, so far as I could see, held no mental pleasure or pain. Considered physically, I found that she was more influenced by heat and cold than by any other agents. The sun would tempt her out of doors, or the cold wind would drive her in. She was by no means unhappy. She seemed quite content to sit by my side, or to walk or drive with me for hours without speaking. Her whole existence was a negative one.

And she was sweet and docile. She followed every suggestion of mine, fell in with every plan, was ready to go at three o'clock, or even, as I wished; but her compliance and obedience was that of a slave to a new master. It seemed to me that all her life she must have been accustomed to obey some one. It was this habit which had so misled me—had almost made me think that Pauline loved me, or she would not have consented to that hasty marriage. Now, I knew that her ready obedience to her uncle was not a really true thing, but the inability of her mind to offer resistance, and its powerlessness to comprehend the true meaning of the step she was taking.

Such was Pauline, my wife! A woman in her beauty and grace of person; a child in her clouded and unformed or stunted mind. And I, her husband, a strong man craving for love, sought with my thoughts and my resolution, I took that white, well-shaped, unresisting hand in my own, and slept still holding it.

Sleep! Yes, it was sleep, if sleep means anything but rest and peace. Never, since the night I heard it, had that woman's stifled moaning come back to me so clearly; never had my dreams so clearly approached the reality of the error which the blind man had felt years ago. Right I thank I was when the haunting cry rose shriller and shriller, and at last, culminated by resolving itself into the shrieking whistle, which told me we were near to Edinburgh. I loosed my wife's hand and recalled my senses. That dream must have been a vivid one, for it left me with the legends of perspiration clammy on my brow.

Never having been to Edinburgh, and wishing to see something of the city, I had proposed staying there for two or three days. During the journey I had suggested this to my wife. She had agreed to it as though place or time was a matter of little moment to her. Nothing, it seemed to me, awoke her interest.

We drove to the hotel and supped together. From our manner we might, at the most, have been friends. Our intercourse, for the time, being confined to the usual civilities shown by a gentleman toward a lady in whose society he is thrown. Pauline thanked me for any little attention to her comfort, and that was all. The journey had been a long and trying one—she looked wearied out.

"You are tired, Pauline," I said; "would you like to go to your room?"

"I am very tired," she spoke almost plaintively.